

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT.

THE CONTEMPORARY EVOLUTION OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN ENGLAND, AMERICA AND INDIA.
BY COUNT GOLINI D'ALVIELLA. Translated by J. MODEN. \$10. pp. 334. G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS.

This work attracted much attention upon its first publication, and its importance justifies its translation. It is an honest and dispassionate endeavor to explain the tendencies of religious thought among the Anglo-Saxons and Aryans, from the point of view of Spencerian Philosophy. The author's exposition is ingenious, and his fundamental assumptions are granted, his conclusions cannot be disputed. Reviewing the modern developments of religious thought in England and the United States as manifested in the leavings toward Agnosticism, Transcendentalism and Unitarianism, and dwelling with emphasis upon the evidences of intellectual fermentation given in this country by the facile evolution of new religious theories and experiments, Count d'Alvella concludes that a pure Theism of the Unitarian type is the most probable outcome of the present agitation. The weakness of the whole discussion lies in the fallacy of the bottom facts. The assumption that the restlessness and loosening of old beliefs is very widespread, in England and the United States is not well supported. It may be conceded that the evolutionary philosophy and modern destructive biblical criticism have done much to weaken religious belief among men of science and of high education. But it is not sufficiently realized by the author that this class is after all numerically small, and that while the influence of its example is powerful, the effect produced by the defection of iconoclastic thinkers from religion, upon the less intelligent classes, is never such as logical induction would predict. Such movements when passed through the distorting media of lower mental capacity, too often issue in monstrosities. The philosophy of the Encyclopedia thus issued in Sansculottism and the Terror. The rational scepticism of Diderot and Voltaire was translated into the massacre of the Abbaye and the *royales* of Carré. If indeed England and America were in the condition of religious thought described by M. d'Alvella, the prospect would be alarming; for when the strongest intellects of a people discard all but the most abstract conceptions in religion, the masses are certain to go a step further, and reject religion altogether. The common mind cannot rest content with being in a "power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness." It cannot solace itself, when torn and maddened by the ceaseless struggle for existence, with contemplation of The Absolute. No theory of the abstract sublimity of the Universe will bring hope and consolation to simple hearts bleeding under bereavement, or made desperate by unmerited misfortune. Neither Cosmism nor Comtism have any intelligible message for the millions who constitute at once the problem and the peril of modern civilization. Their daily experience has rendered them only too ready to accept the declaration that there is no personal God, that there is no Providence that blinds necessity or careless chance fetter and paralyze human effort. The energies of life exhausted in keeping soul and body together, existence one long battle with never a victory—what, to those so situated, can the tendency of religious thought mean, when it is away from all the beliefs that shed light, however dim and distant, upon the dismal scene? There are millions of men and women living to-day for whom this earth would be a hell if the hope of Heaven was eliminated. Will such be content to toil on in perpetual misery shut out from any brighter future here or hereafter? The history of the past answers that question. If supernaturalism is to be destroyed, there remains no bulwark against anarchy, for no philosophy can make this life worth living to the masses of any country if existence on this planet is the be-all and the end-all of humanity. And therefore when Count d'Alvella, having convinced himself that the intellectual classes in England and America are tending toward a modified agnosticism, concludes that the two nations will gently and quietly work out their evolution to the same hazy tenets, he is not justified in this inference.

His examination of the state of religious development in India is even more seriously affected by gratuitous assumptions. To obtain the semblance of a parallel between the movements of Western and Eastern speculation he is obliged to attach to the Brahma-Somaj an importance which it does not deserve. The strongest tendency of modern Indian thought has been Agnostic. Young India has derived this from the Anglo-Indian colleges. Modern science has destroyed a multitude of venerable superstitions, and with them some ancient beliefs deserving preservation. The position of these young men is a familiar one. They affect to believe nothing. They have repudiated the Vedas and the Gospel. If they have outgrown the Hindu Pantheon, they conceive themselves fully emancipated from the temples of Christianity. As for the Brahma-Somaj, its relation to the mass of Indian religious thought is not more close or important than is the relation of Professor Adler's School of Ethical Culture to the mass of religious thought in the United States. The Brahma-Somaj is a sort of fancy religion for Indians of very delicate and transcendental mentality; a Hindu Unitarianism with the one God considerably relegated far into the background as to offend no scientific agnosticism. The two hundred millions of Hindus cannot be represented by the four thousand or so members of the Brahma-Somaj. It would be as unreasonable as to gauge the size of Christendom by the views of the Magdeletians or the followers of Johanna Scoutinge.

Count d'Alvella has men ioned, but without apprehending the importance of it, the Theosophic movement in India. As a matter of fact this has hundreds of followers for every one secured by the Brahma-Somaj. And in the steady and rapid spread of Theosophy in India there is abundant food for reflection, for in this movement is to be seen a distinct reaction from the materialism of the West, and the revival of doctrines which, instead of discouraging, appeal to the strongest sympathies of the people. Theosophy teaches universal brotherhood—a bold and telling blow at caste. It urges the importance of Vedantic literature, taking the ground that the ancient Aryan religious learning embodies truths from which all peoples have borrowed, and which none can afford to ignore or despise. It insists also on the cultivation of occult science, holding that herein is to be found a great system of psychologic culture explaining all and more than all the mysteries which have perplexed the Western world so long. It teaches belief in a future whose possibilities are practically infinite, but all of whose pregressions are affected and controlled through conduct here. The effects of the Theosophic doctrines have already been demonstrated by the accession of nearly a million members in all parts of India, and the movement is only in its infancy. Unquestionably this, and not the Brahma-Somaj, is the most significant expression of religious thought in India at the present time, and the one which promises the most important changes in the immediate future.

We have gone over the ground covered by M. d'Alvella as rapidly as possible, and have endeavored to show that while his review is clever and interesting, and thoroughly honest in intention, he has been misled by the clamor and parade of what are really small cliques or classes, and not, as he supposes, the heads of columns of national opinion. A foreigner may be pardoned for mistaking the manifestations of intellectual restlessness which so readily develop into new "isms" in this country for far-reaching movements. We discuss every fresh outcropping of this kind so frankly that sometimes they seem more important than they are, even to ourselves. But in the United States, as in England, there is a deep ocean of religious thought which remains undisturbed by these surface commotions, and which, while it has its tides, its ebbs and flows, continues constant in bulk, or grows slyly with the national expansion. At present there is no serious evidence of any revolutionary change in religious thought, in fact. There is, of course, as there always has been, plenty of religion everywhere; but it will not do to take this as in any sense the gauge of religious feeling, as some modern writers appear, unconsciously and not disengenuously, prone to do. Count d'Alvella

has written a brilliant book, but after all it is superficial, and its data are so erroneous that it cannot be accepted as a satisfactory analysis of the problem with which it deals.

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